

2007 FALL OUTLOOK

Finding Your Soul Via the Soles of Your Feet

By Randy Kreil



CRAIG BIRHLE

This is for all of you who love to walk when you hunt. I know you exist because I've seen your footprints. I've seen the tread of your boots in badlands gumbo, along damp aspen forest paths in the Turtle Mountains, in pocket gopher mounds on the prairie, and in snow that fills cattail marshes in late December.

I don't remember when I discovered my addiction to walking. It might have been on my first deer hunt in the badlands back in high school. I remember looking back across the rugged beauty of Bear Creek at the long jagged ridge in the distance that is Kendley Plateau and thinking: "I walked all the way from there to here?" Or maybe it was rooted in the teen-age exuberance of chasing sharp-tails for miles in the native prairie hills along the Sheyenne River valley south of Devils Lake.

Walking is something I enjoy and seemingly must do year-round. The dog and I usually get in a 4-mile walk through the neighborhood several times a week between hunting seasons. Sometimes we even drive to familiar haunts far from the commotion of Bismarck to stretch our legs and spend a few precious hours wandering in solitude.

The mallard index this spring was the eighth highest on record.

Walking is good exercise and a dose of fresh air is good no matter the weather or time of year. I'm also convinced that walking year-round makes it easier to get in shape – especially the older I get – for those September grouse hunts, October pheasant hunts and, if the lottery swings my way, a mule deer hunt in November.

I know that I am not alone in this craving to put one foot in front of the other for hours in places where wild critters live. I've seen the telltale signs of your hikes on clear, calm February afternoons with the supposed purpose of looking for deer sheds. In reality, you needed to feel the familiar comfort of a good pair of boots, the strain in your legs, and fresh air in your lungs. Any forked pieces of bone you found were a bonus.

I know, too, the well-earned breaks you've taken in remote places to trace with binoculars your back-trail to the landmark that signals where you started. You congratulate yourself in knowing how hard you worked to get there – tired legs and sore feet are evidence – but then quietly laugh when it dawns on you the challenge ahead of walking all the way back.

The benefits of walking when hunting are seemingly endless. You have the opportunity to experience the natural world in a way that just can't be duplicated through a windshield.

The subtle beauty of the prairie landscape, the colors, creatures and sky all look different with a good pair of boots on. Walking gives you time to think and hit the reset button in your head.

You know your chances of finding that elusive white-tailed buck or to fill your game vest with a limit of pheasants increases when you walk over the hill a half-mile or so. You sleep long and hard after a full day of stomping through cattail marshes looking for that late-season rooster.

An added bonus is meeting some really great people away from the road. Stopping and comparing observations from the day, talking about how the dogs are working, and sharing a frozen Snickers bar, creates a unique bond between strangers. You likely have a lot more in common with these folks than with the coffee drinking magpies, as my good friend calls them, who show up on surrounding roads and trails during deer season when you are plowing through deep cover or snow on a cold, windy day.

Landowners are truly impressed by hunters who walk. They rapidly tire of road hunters. I've found they are more willing to grant permission to hunt if your boots look like they've been used for their intended purpose. These same stewards of the land also notice when your game vest not only contains a few birds, but an assortment of cans, bottles, plastic and other debris you collected while walking on their property. This trash doesn't belong outdoors, but is especially bothersome when it is found in places accessible only on foot.

There is a long list of what I call walking truisms. See if these look familiar and I bet you can add a few more without much effort.

- Have you noticed that it seems you can walk longer and farther with a rifle slung

over a shoulder or a shotgun cradled in the crook of your elbow?

- You should always walk the field or cover all the way to the end. How many times have a you stopped just short to talk with your hunting companions, or sat down for a snack and drink of water, only to have your quarry flush, leaving you fumbling to respond?

- You feel more alive and have more energy when your feet are in contact with earth instead of asphalt and concrete.

- Landowners like the Private Land Open To Sportsmen program for many reasons, but a primary one is that the areas are walking access only. Remember this and respect their wishes.

- You will always find the energy to walk over the hill to a special spot with a nice view even though you have never found game there.

- We are all grateful that sundown during deer season comes at 5:30 p.m. and not hours later.

- Each year you always seem to stop and rest by the same lichen-covered glacial boulder on the same sunny hillside out of the wind. There is something about these familiar, yet faraway places that draw you back.

- Walking is great exercise. The more you walk, the more you get to eat.

Autumn will be here sooner than you think. What follows, prepared by North Dakota Game and Fish Department game management biologists, gives you an idea on what to expect this fall.

North Dakota's wildlife resources are plentiful and opportunities abound. It's up to you to make the most of it. Break in a good pair of boots, get the dog out of the kennel, and do as much walking as you can. Doing so will remind you why we hunt and why we are so stubbornly dedicated to our outdoor traditions. Remember, a great way to find your soul is through the soles of your feet.

RANDY KREIL is the Game and Fish Department's wildlife division chief.



CRAIG BIHRLE

In 2006, an all-time high of more than 100,000 deer were taken in North Dakota.

DOVES

Mike Szymanski, *Migratory Game Bird Biologist, Bismarck*

Barring some really cool nights in late August, North Dakota dove hunters should expect good opportunities in early fall.

Despite a slight decrease from last year, breeding bird numbers generally remain high in North Dakota except for some eastern portions of the state where surveys indicated counts lower than typical. Production this year appears to be good, although cool, wet weather in May reduced the number of clutches produced by mourning doves in North Dakota.

Hunters in central North Dakota will likely have additional opportunities to hunt watering areas for doves given the precipitation turnaround. However, this could also spread birds out, so hunters may need to spend some time scouting to find big dove concentrations. Sometimes a short hike to a secluded waterhole will do the trick.

Eurasian collared doves, which are included with white-winged doves in the daily bag limit of 15 birds, continue to spread across the state. Eurasian collared doves are about half-again the size of mourning doves, and are lighter colored with a squared-off tail. They also have a thin black neck collar. White-winged doves are slightly larger than mourning doves, have large white patches on their wings, and a squared-off tail. These two species are not native to North Dakota, but their numbers have been increasing in recent years.

Some dove hunters may be contacted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to participate in a wing survey beginning this season. Hunters will be randomly selected to clip one wing from each dove they shoot early in the season. The FWS will provide postage-free envelopes to mail wings.

Hunters are also reminded to look for banded mourning doves in their bag and report bands directly to FWS bird banding laboratory at 800-327-2263.

SANDHILL CRANES

Mike Szymanski

The Mid-Continent Sandhill Crane Population spring survey was disrupted by weather, but based on numbers of cranes seen migrating and observed in the central Platte River Valley of Nebraska, it appears the population is stable and doing well.

It's too early to predict the fall sandhill crane flight in North Dakota. Weather and hunting pressure throughout the migration corridor will dictate when birds arrive.

The two zone structure for sandhill cranes continues. Zone 1 (west of U.S. Highway 281) has a season length of 58 days and a daily bag limit of three cranes. Zone 2 (east of U.S. Highway 281) has a season length of 37 days and a daily bag of two birds.

Nonresident crane hunters can pursue the wary birds with either a nonresident small game or waterfowl license. Hunters using a nonresident waterfowl license must stay in the waterfowl zones dictated by their license.

Hunters are also reminded to identify their target before shooting, as federally endangered whooping cranes are often present throughout North Dakota during fall. Report all whooping crane sightings to the Game and Fish Department in Bismarck at 701-328-6300.

RING-NECKED PHEASANTS

Stan Kohn, *Upland Game Management Supervisor, Bismarck*

A string of mild winters has helped ring-necked pheasants. Add in the Conservation Reserve Program, which has put about 3.3 million acres of nesting habitat on the state's landscape, and you have the ingredients necessary to increase not only pheasant numbers, but also their range.

However, things change and so does the state's pheasant population. Early signs point to a somewhat lower fall pheasant population than the last few years. This spring's crowing count showed a small decrease in breeding birds throughout most of the traditional pheasant range.

Early spring rains led to a substantial green-up of vegetation, providing better nesting cover for birds. More rain and cooler temperatures during peak pheasant hatch, however, made for less than ideal conditions for eggs and chicks. Therefore, there is some concern about hatch success and chick survival, especially in the southern part of the state. We'll know more after late summer roadside brood counts are completed, but hope remains for a pretty good hunting season.

The Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program continues to provide access to good hunting areas throughout North Dakota's best pheasant country.

WILD TURKEYS

Stan Kohn

Winter produced more snow and cold in many parts of North Dakota's wild turkey range than in past years, but there were few reports of winter mortality. While extensive spring rains probably did not help turkey reproduction, it's too early to predict how it may influence the fall population.

Department late summer brood surveys will hopefully provide an indication of brood

There is some concern – thanks to cool, wet weather during peak pheasant hatch – about hatch success and chick survival in North Dakota's pheasant population.



CRAIG BIEHRLE



CRAIG BIRHLE

More than 8,000 wild turkey licenses were available to hunters this fall.

and chick survival. There is no doubt spring rains did improve brood cover and insect populations important to chick survival.

Many hunters had to work a little harder to find a wild turkey last fall. The turkey population in several hunting units in southern and southwestern North Dakota was down from previous years due to dry conditions prompting poor reproduction. In other units, the population was lower than in past years, but actually at a desired level for available habitat.

This fall, 8,025 wild turkey licenses (an increase of 100 from 2006) are available for North Dakota residents. Last fall, 5,982 hunters harvested 3,194 birds for a success of 53 percent. Hunters had the best hunting success in central and western North Dakota, which is where the best turkey hunting will occur this fall.

Turkey licenses are issued by lottery, with the number of licenses issued in each unit determined by the wild turkey population.

RUFFED GROUSE

Stan Kohn

North Dakota is fortunate to have some native aspen woodlands in Rolette, Bottineau, Pembina, Walsh, Cavalier and portions of McHenry counties. These forests hold ruffed grouse, our only native woodland grouse species.

Forty years of census data in North Dakota indicates ruffed grouse numbers cycle about every 8-10 years. Today, we are slowly moving out of a low population cycle.

Even though the number of hunters and harvest has been low since 2004, there is a group of dedicated woodland hunters who enjoy pursuing ruffed grouse no matter how long they have to walk before a flush.

Ruffed grouse spring census information was not available when *North Dakota OUT-DOORS* went to press. However, there are some positive indications that the population is about to improve. Drumming count surveys in spring 2005 showed the number of displaying males increased about 37 percent from 2004, and the 2006 count found drums up 27 percent from 2005.

As with all species, habitat is the key. A good mixture of young and old aspen trees, with a thick shrub understory of beaked hazel, will improve nesting success and brood survival.

Ruffed grouse hunting nearly ends each year when snow blankets the forest. That can be early in North Dakota, and frequently several weeks of the season remain with virtually no one hunting these superb birds.

For the best ruffed grouse hunting in North Dakota, hunters should concentrate on

the Turtle Mountains in Bottineau and Rolette counties and the Pembina Hills area of Cavalier and Pembina counties.

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE

Stan Kohn

Things are looking good for another exciting sharp-tailed grouse season. The spring breeding population showed another slight increase in all districts. On the surface, this set the stage for potentially producing numbers of young birds.

Several mild winters have contributed to good winter survival for sharptails. Habitat conditions were certainly improved over previous years, but it's unknown the influence wet, cool spring weather had on nesting success and brood survival.

Again, late summer roadside counts will shed some light.

Nesting and brood rearing habitat remains plentiful. The Conservation Reserve Program has provided a boost to sharptails in many regions of the state. While native grasslands continue to provide habitat in much of southwestern North Dakota, the central, southern and northern parts of the state now have good bird numbers thanks to CRP. But that is probably going to change in the next couple of years. As CRP acres decline, so likely will sharptail numbers.

If you have an interest in sharptail hunting, don't procrastinate. Now is the time to get out while hunting opportunities exist.

SAGE GROUSE

Stan Kohn

The fall sage grouse season will likely be similar to 2006. In a season with few hunters and a limited population, there really isn't much difference from year to year.

In summers of good rainfall, and when green vegetative conditions prevail into the hunting season, birds seem to be more widespread or evenly distributed. In dry years, birds move to areas of "greener pastures" and hunters don't find them in typical fall areas.

Data from a study in sage grouse range in southwestern North Dakota showed rather high nesting success this spring and good brood survival. This might indicate a better fall population than in the past.

North Dakota's sharp-tailed grouse breeding population showed a slight increase this spring.



CRAIG BIRHLE



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Young sage grouse.

This will be the fourth sage grouse hunting season with a delayed opener. Delaying the opener may have lowered hunter participation and success a little, but it seems to have accomplished the goal of reducing harvest of adult female sage grouse, which helps in long-term management of this unique species.

PRAIRIE CHICKENS

Stan Kohn

North Dakota saw its prairie chicken population increase enough to hold its first hunting season in decades in 2004.

Prairie chicken numbers have continued to increase slightly each year and have offered hunters another unique opportunity to hunt a marvelous upland game bird in two areas, namely in eastern Grand Forks County and in southeastern North Dakota.

Although the total spring count data was not available at press time, it appears spring breeding numbers may be up slightly in the southeast, but down slightly in Grand Forks County. However, the potential for average prairie chicken production looks to be better in Grand Forks County. Heavy and frequent rains in the southeast may have posed some problems for nesting and brooding prairie chickens.

North Dakota will have another nine-day season in both hunting units this fall. Fifty permits were allowed in each unit for resident hunters. Successful applicants can take two prairie chickens and a daily limit of three sharp-tailed grouse.

HUNGARIAN PARTRIDGE

Stan Kohn

Even though Hungarian partridge seem to be making a small comeback, don't expect to see an abundance of birds this fall. Last fall's harvest did show some improvement in partridge age ratio, which is a good sign for hunters. Hunters also reported seeing more partridge last fall than in past years.

However, we need to remain cautious with these optimistic reports as, once again, it wasn't the most favorable spring for ground nesting upland game birds.

The partridge population has been down for more than a decade. Many of today's hunters probably don't remember the good partridge years prior to 1993. Partridge numbers since 1994 have actually been relatively stable, just at a low level. But if you have located one of those few areas of the state where the partridge population is improving, it should be as good or better than last year.

MOOSE

Roger Johnson, Big Game Management Supervisor, Devils Lake

Last fall, 129 moose license holders shot 116 moose for a 91 percent success rate. This fall, moose license numbers were bumped to 147.

Snow conditions during 2006-07 allowed for a partial moose survey in northeastern North Dakota. The survey indicated a slight decrease in moose numbers in the northeast, but increases in north central and north-western areas of the state allowed for the increase in moose permits.

Because of the low count in the Pembina Hills area, unit M1C will remain closed in 2007 in an effort to increase moose numbers. Moose permits in M10 were increased from 30 to 40 to stabilize increasing moose numbers in this area of the state. The Turtle Mountain area also showed an increase in moose this year and permit numbers were increased.

Moose sightings continue along the Missouri River and in the Williston area. The continued moose expansion across the state will likely result in expanded hunting areas in the future.

To determine the cause of declines in moose in timbered areas, the Game and Fish Department is continuing to help fund a project with the University of North Dakota.

Study results are expected this fall.

Information from the study, is expected to help big game biologists better manage this unique species in North Dakota.

ELK

Roger Johnson

There are a number of changes for the 2007 elk season.

Unit E1 will remain open for both antlered and antlerless elk in 2007, although the December portion of the E1 season is still for antlerless elk only. In an attempt to reduce the number of elk outside Theodore Roosevelt National Park, 20 more licenses are available in E3, and units E3 and E4 will have a second hunting period in October. The changes in the E3 and E4 hunting season are based on increased elk sightings during the Department's mule deer surveys, National Park Service data collected on radio-collared elk, and local observations.

Elk surveys in both the Pembina Hills and Killdeer Mountain areas were completed in 2006-07 and numbers remain within management goals and tolerable limits of area landowners.

Last fall, 259 licensed hunters harvested 155 elk for a 60 percent success rate. Work continues by the National Park Service to formulate a plan for controlling elk numbers in the park. Because of increasing numbers of elk in an around the park, some late changes to elk permit numbers were made.

North Dakota's mule deer population continues to grow.



RON WILSON



Nearly 149,000 deer licenses will be made available to hunters this fall, an increase from the 143,500 licenses in 2006.

Units E3 and E4 will have an additional season for elk in September, with an additional 100 any elk permits and 30 antlerless permits available. E4 will have an additional 15 any-elk and 15 antlerless elk permits in the September season. In total, North Dakota has 421 elk licenses available for 2007.

MULE DEER

Bruce Stillings, Big Game Management Biologist, Dickinson

North Dakota mule deer hunters shouldn't tire of hearing that another fall of good opportunities to hunt one of the state's most coveted big game species awaits.

A string of mild winters, along with a conservative harvest strategy, have led to growth in the state's mule deer population. This is the ninth consecutive year the mule deer spring index is higher than the long-term average.

According to 2007 spring aerial counts, the mule deer population in North Dakota's badlands is much higher than average. The spring index indicated nearly 10 deer per square mile, which is considerably higher than the long-term average of slightly more than six deer per square mile. Last fall's demographic survey was also positive. Counts indicated the population had nearly average production and a healthy buck-to-doe ratio of 40 bucks per 100 does.

In response to the healthy population, the number of mule deer licenses was increased by 700 to 8,350, giving hunters a great opportunity to hunt mule deer in the badlands this fall.

Mule deer have also increased in hunting units adjacent to the badlands. Recently, any-deer licenses were increased in these units to raise the mule deer harvest. North Dakota hunters should expect another good hunting season with success rates typically 80-90 percent.

PRONGHORN

Bruce Stillings

For the second time in three years, North Dakota will issue a record number of prong-

horn gun licenses, which is welcome news for residents who enjoy hunting this unique big game animal.

Several years of conservative harvest strategy, combined with a little help from Mother Nature, has resulted in the recovery of North Dakota's pronghorn population, which dropped to a low of 4,000 animals in 1998 after the tough winter in 1996-97.

In early July, biologists conducted aerial surveys on 90 percent of the primary pronghorn range to determine abundance, distribution and demographics of North Dakota's pronghorn population. The results indicate a statewide population estimate of 15,200 animals – up 20 percent from 2006 and 280 percent from the low in 1998. Age and sex ratios were 35 bucks per 100 does and 61 fawns per 100 does. The 2007 survey indicates that pronghorn management regions west of the Missouri River are at or above population objectives.

More than 6,000 gun licenses are available this year, an increase of 2,285 from 2006, and 380 more than the previous all-time high. Hunters in the badlands will enjoy a significant increase in hunting opportunities, while prospects in the southwestern corner will be slightly lower than last year. Archery hunting remains unlimited and will likely resemble the 2006 season, which provided opportunities for more than 1,700 archers.

The pronghorn population east of the Missouri River is still too low to sustain a harvest.

North Dakota's pronghorn population has rebounded nicely since the brutal 1996-97 winter.



WHITE-TAILED DEER

Bill Jensen, *Big Game Management Biologist, Bismarck*

Following yet another mild winter, the fall hunting season is shaping up as another good one for white-tailed deer hunters.

In 2006, an all-time high of more than 100,000 deer were harvested. The overall success rate last fall for the regular gun season was about 76 percent. Archery (42 percent) and muzzleloader (44 percent) hunter success last year was about average.

Winter aerial surveys, hunter observations and deer-vehicle collisions continue to suggest stable to increasing deer numbers along a band running diagonally from southwestern North Dakota to the northeastern corner of the state. For the last several years the Department has been setting aggressive harvest rates for antlerless deer. The result has been reduced deer numbers in the northwestern and southeastern corners.

In response to remaining high deer numbers in selected units, particularly the northeastern portion of the state, Game and Fish made 148,550 deer gun licenses available this fall. This is an increase from 143,500 in 2006, and exceeds the previous all-time high of 145,600 licenses in 2005. In an attempt to drive down the whitetail population, the vast majority of licenses that make up the increase are for any-antlerless deer. The long-term goal is to reduce overall deer numbers in the state so that about 99,000 licenses will maintain a relatively stable population.

With the increasing popularity of electronic applications (more than 52 percent of hunters applied over the Internet this year), license processing is becoming faster and more efficient. Hunters can also quickly and easily purchase additional licenses over the Internet. Hunters with second and third (or more) doe licenses can use these licenses during archery and muzzleloader seasons with the appropriate firearm or bow in the designated hunting unit.

BIGHORN SHEEP

Brett Wiedmann, *Big Game Management Biologist, Dickinson*

North Dakota's six bighorn sheep license holders should have good hunting opportunities in 2007 as they pursue mature rams in the state's rugged badlands. Similar to 2006, the Game and Fish Department issued five lottery licenses and one by auction, the latter generating a record \$50,000 for bighorn management in North Dakota.

In an effort to increase harvest of mature rams, the 2007 opener was moved from September 21 to October 12, when the majority of the oldest rams become more accessible to hunters during rut.

Early indications from summer surveys hint that 2007 could be another excellent year for lamb recruitment, as mild winters and spring rains have been favorable to lamb production.

Following a successful transplant from Montana's Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge in 2006, the Department again received approval from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to obtain 20 bighorns in January 2007. However, this band came from the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, located west of Charles M. Russell NWR. Although three of the transplanted ewes have been killed by mountain lions since their release, most of the remaining females have been observed with lambs, and hopefully will be more adept at avoiding the big cats now that they are more familiar with their new North Dakota home. The transplant project was funded by the Minnesota-Wisconsin Chapter of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep.

The state's bighorn sheep population was estimated at 259 in 2006, an increase of 14 percent from 2005, and 36 percent above the five-year average. An additional 20 bighorns also inhabit the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

FURBEARERS

Dorothy Fecske, *Furbearer Biologist, Bismarck*

According to spring surveys, furbearer populations statewide haven't changed much, suggesting that North Dakota will continue to provide good trapping opportunities for common furbearers.

Last year's bobcat harvest was a record, and based on the amount of prey, habitat, and a healthy age and sex structure in the harvest, trappers can expect another good year for bobcat.

A third, limited season for mountain lions will start September 1. A small breeding population of mountain lions occurs in the badlands in western North Dakota and transient animals have been documented traveling through other regions of the state. See the 2007-08 Furbearer Guide or Buffaloberry Patch on page 30 for details about the season.

Be on the lookout for rare, but returning members of the weasel family, including river otters, fishers and American martens. These uncommon furbearers are protected with closed seasons in North Dakota.

University studies are currently underway to assess the status of these populations in the state. If you trap along drainages in eastern North Dakota, pay attention for sign (scat, tracks, slides and den sites) of river otters. These aquatic furbearers have been documented along the Red River and in several streams draining into the Red. Fishers also have been detected in northeastern North Dakota, and American martens have been found in the Turtle Mountains. Any incidentally captured furbearer for which the season is closed must immediately be released if alive or reported and turned over to the Department.



CRAIG BIRLE

North Dakota will again offer good trapping opportunities for common furbearers.

The larger weasels aren't the only rare furbearers being sighted in North Dakota. You may encounter a swift fox during your time in the field. Also protected, swift foxes are tan, cat-sized members of the canid family associated with prairie habitats. This past year, two swift foxes from reintroduction efforts in South Dakota traveled into Morton County, and were killed on highways.

Another larger canid has made the news this past year. Wolves were taken off the Endangered Species List in parts of their



CRAIG BHRLE

The fall duck flight from North Dakota is expected to be down about 50 percent from last year and similar to the fall flight of 2004. However, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates an improved continental fall flight because of more ducks breeding in Canada.

range, including Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota and in eastern North Dakota (including land east of the Missouri River to Lake Sakakawea, then east of U.S. Highway 83). Wolves in the western part of the state remain federally endangered. Although wolves in eastern North Dakota are now under state control, the season remains closed. Wolf sightings are occasionally reported in North Dakota, although no known breeding population has been documented.

DUCKS AND GEESE

Mike Johnson, Game Management Section Leader, Bismarck

Numbers of breeding ducks in North Dakota dropped from last year, continuing a decline from the record high in 2002. While the 2007 duck index was down 13 percent from 2006, it did exceed the 60-year average by 51 percent, making it the 13th highest on record.

The index for mallards was up 130 percent from the long-term average and was the eighth highest on record. All duck species, except pintails (down 12 percent), remained at or above the 60-year average.

The 2007 water index in North Dakota, determined during the spring breeding duck survey, was up 39 percent from 2006 or 43 percent above the 1948-2006 average.

Although the statewide water index appears relatively good, wetland conditions are generally worse than the numbers show. This is because the survey counts water areas, not the amount of water in the wetlands. Meaning: wetlands with even a trace

of water contribute as much to the index as those that are full. The exception is southeastern North Dakota, which was wet last year and had significant precipitation this year just days prior to the survey. Keep in mind, however, that much of the state received significant rainfall after the survey, flooding roads and crops.

Reports from Canada indicate that much of the Prairie Pothole Region and parklands continue to have good to excellent water conditions for the third year in a row. Nesting cover in North Dakota is in good shape. Conservation Reserve Program acres are declining, but we are still carrying more than 3 million acres.

North Dakota's 2007 fall duck flight is expected to be down about 50 percent from last year and similar to the fall flight of 2004.

Even though the 2007 brood index from the Department's annual mid-July survey was down from last year's record high index, it is still 72 percent above the 1955-2006 average. Average brood size was 6.4 ducklings, down slightly from last year. The long-term average is 7.1 ducklings per brood.

Resident giant Canada goose numbers continue to increase. The population objective is 80,000 birds, but the 2007 Game and Fish Department estimate is nearly 260,000 geese, up 26 percent from 2006.

North Dakota's wildlife resources are plentiful and opportunities abound.

It's up to you to make the most of it. Break in a good pair of boots, get the dog out of the kennel, and do as much walking as you can.